

## **Polio Plus Presentation District 5160 Leadership Assembly**

### **Frequently Asked Questions About PolioPlus**

**Q: What is polio? A:** Polio is an infectious disease caused by the polio virus. The disease can strike at any age, but typically affects children under three. The virus is passed through poor or careless hygiene, entering the body through the mouth, then multiplying inside the throat and the intestines. Once established, the polio virus can enter the bloodstream and invade the central nervous system, spreading along nerve fibers. As it multiplies, the virus destroys the motor neurons that activate muscles. The nerve cells cannot be regenerated and the affected muscles no longer function. Polio paralysis is almost always irreversible. In the most severe cases, polio virus attacks the motor neurons of the brain stem, resulting in difficulty breathing and can result in death. Most children and adults infected with the polio virus suffer only symptoms of a fever; only 1% of polio cases result in paralysis.

**Q: Why did Rotary choose polio? A:** During the 1970s, Rotary International began a search a global humanitarian program where members could actively participate not just by fund-raising, but by volunteering in their communities and across the world — the cornerstone of Rotary's charter. The answer came in 1979 when Rotary launched a five-year polio immunization program in the Philippines along with the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Philippine Ministry of Health. The initiative was declared a success, signifying the end of Rotary's search.

**Q: Isn't the program finished? A:** This is a common misconception in polio free countries. It is true that major gains have been made in the global fight against polio. In September 1994, the entire Western Hemisphere was certified polio free. But, some of the most difficult battles have yet to be fought. Fifty countries remain polio endemic. Many of these countries lack sufficient political and economic commitment, or are embroiled in conflicts.

**Q: What will be needed to achieve the goal of a polio free world? A:** Nothing less than the active participation of every Rotarian in every club and district in the world. Polio is a disease that does not respect geographical or political borders. To become complacent is to risk losing the gains we have made. Therefore, Rotary International encourages every Rotarian to continue their commitment to global polio eradication by remaining knowledgeable about Rotary's historic support of this public health initiative and by participating in the PolioPlus Program and PolioPlus Partners Programs.

**Q: What is an NID? A:** National Immunization Days aim to interrupt the circulation of the wild polio virus by immunizing every child in the highest risk age group (normally under the age of five) quickly and effectively by flooding a country with the oral polio vaccine. In countries where polio is endemic, this usually involves organizing two rounds of National Immunization Days a year — one month apart — for a period of at least three years. The aim is to catch children who are non-immunized, or only partially protected and boost the immunity of children already immunized. This way, every child in the most susceptible age group is protected against polio at the same time - instantly depriving the virus of the fertile seedbed to thrive.

**Q: What is social mobilization? A:** Social mobilization is organized community activities designed to help make effective the immunization, surveillance and polio eradication goals at regional, national and local levels. It is the name given to the vast cooperative effort of public and private organizations comprising the thousands of individual elements necessary to make National Immunization Day campaigns successful. Rotary International's definition of social mobilization includes the following activities:

## **Polio Plus Presentation District 5160 Leadership Assembly**

- Publicity campaigns concerning immunization days.
- Logistical support at immunization centers such as record keeping, care and service for those awaiting immunization and to those conducting immunizations.
- Transportation of personnel or materials to immunization centers.
- Education of medical and health care personnel, community leaders, parents and the general public in the importance of polio immunization and eradication and ways in which they can help achieve goals.

**Q: What is surveillance?** **A:** This hefty term essentially refers to the monitoring at the local, national, regional and global level of the incidence and transmission of polio. This absolutely critical element of polio eradication involves rapid collection and assessment of a stool sample of a child who is suspected to have polio. This work begins with reporting of suspected cases of polio by health workers and pediatricians at the local level. Stool specimens are obtained from children suspected to have polio. A network of more than 80 laboratories around the world performs analysis of such samples. The work is anything but glamorous. However, it will become increasingly important as we approach the achievement of a polio-free world.

**Q: What is the "Plus" in PolioPlus?** **A:** The "Plus" in PolioPlus has evolved over time. Today it refers to the legacy that the global polio eradication initiative has created which can be applied to future health concerns. Lessons learned from this historic 20 year-drive include:

- Massive public education drives to promote immunization activities;
- Vaccine deployment strategies to reach children in remote or isolated regions;
- Tools such as vaccine carriers to protect vaccine in harsh temperatures and specimen containers needed to preserve the integrity of samples;
- The public-private partnerships formed to fortify national government's health programs will serve as a model for years to come;
- Strengthened worldwide laboratory network will continue to support disease surveillance efforts long after polio has been eradicated; and
- Most importantly, the global polio eradication program has paved the way for cease-fire truce agreements in a number of warring nations, negotiating major humanitarian assistance in fragile environments.

**Q: What major public health initiative will Rotary support next?** **A:** Rotary International is committed to achieving polio eradication. The Rotary Foundation Trustees have stated the commitment in their "Statement on Commitment to Global Polio Eradication" which reads as follows:

"The Trustees of The Rotary Foundation, in accordance with the decision adopted by the 1995 Council on Legislation, affirm that the global eradication of polio is, and must remain, the premier goal of Rotary International and its Foundation until the day that the world is certified as being rid of the polio virus."

If you have a question about PolioPlus that is not answered above, contact Bob Linscheid, District Director, Polio Plus Campaign Chair- [blinscheid@wemanage.org](mailto:blinscheid@wemanage.org) - 530-343-3317 X 110.